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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to examine the characteristics of adult education in rural areas, to determine the differences between adult education in rural and urban settings, and to explore possible barriers which prevent rural residents from seeking further education. The investigator analyzed existing literature on participation rates, needs assessment data, interest indexes, program evaluations, and research studies and compared it with studies conducted on adult learning experiences in a rural area--West Central Minnesota. The study focused on formal educational programs, predominately at the postsecondary level, but also drew upon information and data from informal educational settings and community education (secondary) programs. It was found that rural adults focus their efforts toward noncredit personal development, whereas urban adults participate more readily in credit programs of a vocational nature. Other findings were that adult education in both settings is concentrated most heavily in age categories below 40 and that men participate more frequently in urban areas while women participate more frequently in rural areas. It was also found that significant barriers to continued learning exist more often for rural adults than for urban adults, the most serious of which are access to educational programs (distance), lack of adequate finances, and lack of advising and counseling. Based on the results of the study, the investigator recommends that adult education programs in rural areas be developed with a strong emphasis upon self-improvement and personal development and that program costs be kept minimal. The report includes a bibliography and an outline map of West Central Minnesota. (IMS)

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ANALYSIS OF ADULT LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN RURAL SETTINGS

a paper presented at the

Eighteenth Annual
Adult Education Research Conference
Minneapolis, Minnesota

April 21, 1977

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INTRODUCTION

Ever since the release of the report, "Less Time More Options" by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education in 1971 (3), much attention at the post-secondary education level has been focused upon continuing education programs specifically, and the education of adults generally. Subsequently in 1974, according to the Pitchell Report (28), a new majority had emerged among the student body of post-secondary education and a renewed interest in adult education on the part of all of post-secondary education was kindled. This sparked new program development and the expansion of existing programs, in the hopes of capturing a piece of the "market." Programs found successful in one part of the country were quickly transplanted to other areas, and adult education programs proliferated.

However, most of the "success stories" of growing adult education enrollments and innovations emanated from programs conducted in urban areas and little attention was paid to the educational experiences of rural adults. (This is not to say that successful programs in rural areas were not conducted--rather, the literature focused upon urban areas.) What, however, has been going on in rural areas that was similar or different to adult learning experiences in urban areas? That question provides the basic framework for this study. Further, the study focuses upon the experiences of adult learning within formal educational programs, predominately at the post-secondary level, but draws upon information and data from informal educational settings and community education (secondary) programs. Essentially, the study is an analysis of selected literature including the incorporation of previous investigations conducted by the author and his colleagues and is reported in the context of ongoing research. The rural

setting analyzed in this study was West Central Minnesota (see Appendix A).

NATURE OF THE STUDY

This study focused upon the phenomenon of adult learning in rural settings by analyzing participation rates, needs assessment data, interest inventories, program evaluations, and research studies of post-secondary continuing education programs. The basic hypothesis pursued in this investigation was:

> Adult learning at the post-secondary educational level takes place in both rural and urban settings at about the same rate of frequency; however, adults in urban areas tend to focus their efforts toward learning activities leading to vocational preparation or advancement, whereas, adults in rural areas focus their attention on learning experiences that enhance personal development, self-improvement and special interests, e.g., hobbies and recreation.

For the purpose of this study, attention was drawn to studies of adult participation in formal educational settings at the post-secondary level, however, it was noted that considerable learning takes place in the "educational periphery" as reported in the literature by Tough (31).

A secondary premise pursued in this investigation was:

> Adults in rural areas more often experience significant barriers to post-secondary educational opportunities than do adults in urban areas.

With these two guiding suppositions, the study was undertaken by analyzing existing information reported in the literature of adult education and comparing and contrasting the findings with studies conducted in a rural area—West Central Minnesota.

In pursuing the hypothesis that adult learning takes place in a rural area at about the same frequency as it occurs in an urban area, but with a different emphasis, the following approach was taken:

1. the author reviewed selected literature consisting of:

   a. studies of participation rates of adults engaged in formal continuing education programs,

   b. evaluation reports of adult education programs,

   c. reports of needs assessment concerning the stated educational needs of adults, and,

   d. demographic data related to the adult population.

2. the author assisted in the design, implementation and analysis of original research focusing upon perceived needs for additional education of adults in West Central Minnesota.

3. the author conducted evaluation surveys of adults participating in continuing education programs at the University of Minnesota, Morris.

In pursuing the secondary premise--that adults in rural areas more often experience significant barriers to educational opportunities than adults in urban areas, the following methodology was applied:

1. the author reviewed selected literature consisting of:

   a. studies of actual barriers encountered by adults in rural and urban areas, and

   b. studies of perceived barriers of adults in rural areas.

2. the author assisted in the design, implementation and analysis of original investigations conducted to ascertain the real and perceived barriers that adults face in pursuing educational opportunities in a rural area.

In implementing the review of the literature to test both suppositions, selected studies, reports and information was gathered from international, national, and regional sources.

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Frequency of Participation

The late Imogene E. Okes (25) assembled statistics on adult participation in formal educational settings and reported a total of over 15 million adults engaged in learning activities during 1969. These data are available from

the National Center for Educational Statistics and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Total Adult (17 and older) Participation in Instructional Sources of Adult Education, United States, May 1969

Instructional Source	No. of Men	No. of Women	Total
Public or Private School	1,557,000	2,081,000	3,638,000
College or University (part-time)	1,853,000	1,459,000	3,312,000
Job Training	2,558,000	1,056,000	3,614,000
Correspondence Courses	736,000	315,000	1,051,000
Tutor or Private Instructor	266,000	492,000	758,000
Community Organizations	573,000	1,191,000	1,764,000
Miscellaneous activities	701,000	647,000	1,348,000
Totals	8,244,000	7,241,000	15,485,000

Source: Okes, Imogene E. Participation in Adult Education, 1969 Initial Report, National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C., 1971

Okes (25) further gathered information on participation by age category of adults engaged in formal learning activities; this information is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants in Formal Adult Education Programs As A Percentage of the Total Eligible Population By Age, U.S., May 1969.

Age Category	Population in Age Group	% Participating in Adult Education
17-24	24,800,000	18.0
25-34	23,600,000	18.2
35-44	22,700,000	13.5
45-54	22,700,000	9.4
55-64	17,900,000	4.5
65 and older	18,600,000	1.6

Source: Okes, Imogene E. Participation in Adult Education, 1969 Initial Report, National Center for Educational Statistics, U.S. Government Printing Office Washington, D.C., 1971

These data are impressive and suggest a high frequency of participation in formal educational settings. However, it should be inserted here that not

all adult learning takes place in such formal settings. Allen Tough (31) has stated that almost every adult engages in several learning projects each year; however, he estimates 70% are of a self-directed nature planned by the learner him or herself.

According to the Pitchell Report (28) released in 1974, it was estimated that 57.5% of the post-secondary education student body in 1972 was part-time and the growth rate of part-time students was 2.3 times greater than that of full-time students. Pitchell categorized part-time students as:

1. similar to full-time, except that they are part-time, and
2. professional and occupationally oriented; seeking salary incentives, licensing or recertification.

Included in the report were those individuals participating in sponsored programs of government agencies, corporations and labor unions.

Although, somewhat comparing apples with oranges,* this report heavily suggests a strong growing trend toward participation on the part of the post-secondary education part-time student body, of which the largest proportion were adult, continuing education students. These enrollment patterns parallel the phenomen of the growth of participation in corporate continuing education programs reported by Vermilye (33) taking place mostly in urban areas.

In the 1975-76 Association for Continuing Higher Education/National University Extension Association joint report, "Programs and Registrations" (1), it was reported that registrations of adults from 258 reporting post-secondary institutions totaled 6,322,855 during 1975-76. Of this total number of registrations, 50.7% were in non-credit programs. The area of Business and Management accounted for the largest proportion (16.6%) of all subject areas, and

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* In an August 25, 1976 letter to the NUEA Board of Directors, Dr. Clara Kanun, Director of Continuing Education and Extension Research at the University of Minnesota, analyzed the Pitchell Report and pointed out severe ambiguities in the methodology used, and in fact showed that the adult, part-time students were neither new nor in the majority in post-secondary education.

56.9% of all Business and Management registrations were non-credit. The second largest subject area was Education (16%). The institutions covered in this report are predominately the larger state universities and private urban universities, suggesting that participation in vocationally oriented continuing education programs is more likely to occur in urban settings by urban adults.

This apparent interest in credit (urban) and non-credit (rural) approaches to post-secondary education is somewhat further substantiated by a 1976 report of the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board (23), which showed that part-time students in all of Minnesota's post-secondary educational institutions increased 52.7% from 1971 to 1975. A closer analysis of this report shows that in the Twin Cities Metro Area, the participation rate of part-time students was 20.2%, whereas, in a nine-county area in West Central Minnesota (see Appendix A), the corresponding participation rate was only 7.1%. It should be remembered, however, that these statistics relate to formal credit registrations and do not take into account non-credit programs.

In a study conducted in 1973 by the A.C. Nielson Company, for the Illinois Collegiate Common Market (6), it was reported that 91% of all adults in Illinois were interested in learning a subject or skill; however, only 43% desired formal credit.

In comparing part-time enrollment in higher education in the Fall of 1974 Valley (6), found that there was less participation in formal credit educational programs in rural areas as there were in urban areas. This information is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison of Part-Time Enrollments in Higher Education: Fall 1974

State	% Part-Time Enrollment
California	53.1
Illinois	42.3
Missouri	34.7
Nebraska	29.1
Minnesota	28.3
Iowa	17.6
Total U.S.	37.2

Source: National Center for Educational Statistics, reported in Higher Education Daily December 6, 1975 p. 3-4.

In attempting to work through the issue of coordinating further education programs with local communities in Canada, Long (15) reports that the Provence of Alberta has experienced a low rate of adult participation in formal education, particularly in the rural communities. His estimates of participation in formal education by adults in selected countries are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Estimated Percentage of Participation in Adult Education Programs in Selected Countries

Country	% Participation
Canada	8
England	10
Germany	16
United States	20
Sweden	25
Finland	85

Source: Long, James S. Alberta's Local Further Education Councils, Adult Leadership Vol. 25 No. 3, November 1976.

An analysis of enrollment in the Morris (Minnesota) Community Education Program was completed which showed a 65.2% increase in registrations during 1975-76 over 1974-75. This program is non-credit and designed for adults

interested in self-development and personal improvement. A total of 2,116 adults participated, which represents approximately 18% of the districts total population--young and old alike.

In addition, it can be reported that programs of the Agricultural Extension Service, through the County Extension Office in Stevens County, Minnesota, have experienced increases in enrollment during 1976-77 over 1975-76, although summary statistics were not available at the writing of this report. It is important to note that these programs are almost entirely non-credit. In the Homemaker category alone, there are 33 local Homemakers Groups in Stevens County; this rural county has a total population of 11,740.

Together, these studies suggest that adults in a rural area are indeed interested in learning activities; however, participating in formal credit programs is not that important to them.

Focus of Learning Efforts

In his classic study conducted a number of years ago, Houle (7), determined that there were three types of adult learners in their orientations toward learning: 1) goal-oriented, 2) activity-oriented, and 3) learning-oriented.

Boshier (2) suggested that all adult education participants are goal-oriented and related satisfaction and focus to Maslow's hierarchy. In recent years, Knowles (13) and Tough (31) have explored the focus of adult learning projects vis-a-vis self-directed learning. All have found that adults enter learning situations with a particular focus that seems to fit their immediate needs.

Knox (14) states that adults enter continuing education activities with global concerns for growth and for several fairly specific reasons, i.e., to educate themselves, to find answers, to solve problems and to improve

their ability to know and feel and act.

What, then, is the specific focus of adults in both rural and urban areas? Are they different in their focus toward learning, especially in formal settings?

Isolating on one institution (University of Minnesota) that was reported in the 1975-76 ACHE/NUEA survey, Kanun (11) found that it is interesting to note that 88.5% of all credit registrations (75,580) are from the Twin Cities Metro Area, whereas, 49.8% of all non-credit conference registrations (20,271) are from "out-state" areas. Perhaps this suggests that the earning of formal credit is not as important to rural adults as to urban adults. This is generally consistent with the findings of Johnstone and Rivera (9) of more than a decade ago who concluded that the earning of formal credit is not an important motive in the educational behavior of American adults.

Prior studies conducted by the author on the characteristics of urban adult learners, substantiate this vocational orientation. McCannon (20, 21) found in 1970 and 1972 that approximately 75% of adults attending evening division classes at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa stated their most important reason for enrolling was for career advancement or to prepare for a different job.

According to the 1976 annual report of the National Advisory Council on Extension and Continuing Education (24), one-third of all students enrolled in post-secondary education are 25-34 years old. This perhaps suggests that younger adults tend to focus their attention toward collegiate programs.

In a 1973 report from the U.S. Department of Labor, "Going Back to School at 35" (32), it was stated that older adults who go back to school while also working at their jobs or taking care of home responsibilities demonstrate a strong drive for self-improvement. About 40% of these

individuals were attending trade or vocational schools. It is further interesting to note that of the adult population over 35 returning to school, 53% were women, and 80% were part-time.

In trying to estimate the potential learning force in Iowa for potential non-traditional programs, a study was conducted and published in 1976 by the Educational Testing Service (6), which showed that an estimated 676,800 adults in Iowa would like additional education. The characteristics of these adults indicated that two-thirds were women, only 8% were 50 years or older, and they were predominately residents of metropolitan areas. The results of this study were compared with a 1972 study conducted by the Commission on Non-Traditional Study (6), and showed adults reasons for wanting to learn; these reasons are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Rank Order of Adults Reasons For Wanting to Learn

Reason	Iowa, 1976	CN-TS, 1972
To be better informed	1	1
Personal satisfaction	2	2
Improve income	3	4
Prepare for different job	4	3
Current job requirement	5	5

Source: Hamilton, I. Bruce The Third Century: Post-Secondary Planning for the Nontraditional Learner, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J. 1976.

According to the Iowa study it was estimated that 250,000 potential adult learners in Iowa existed. The study hypothesized that these learners were predominately in the age range of 20-35, city dwellers, female, and had some prior college experience. The study concluded that a large number of Iowans who are older, who lived in rural areas, whose incomes were low and whose previous education was low, did not feel that further formal education interested them.

During the summer of 1976 a survey (4) was conducted of 3,606 households in West Central Minnesota to determine the perceived needs for education beyond high school by residents of the area. The author served as a consulting representative of the West Minn Consortium (Concordia College, Moorhead State University, Fergus Falls Community College, University of Minnesota, Morris and Area Vocational Technical Institutes at Alexandria, Detroit Lakes and Moorhead) to the study team from the Research Coordinating Unit for Vocational Education of the University of Minnesota. The results of the study showed that 60% of the area's residents were interested in education for hobbies and special interests and 40% were interested in education for job training purposes. The subject-area categories having the most response by the participants of the study are shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Type of Education Desired by Residents of West Central Minnesota

Hobbies and Special Interest			Job Training		
Rank	Subject Area	%	Rank	Subject Area	%
1	Technical Skills	25.6	1	Office & Accounting	17.1
2	Arts & Crafts	20.7	2	Public Service	14.1
3	Home Skills	17.8	3.5	Health	12.0
4	Recreation	12.9	3.5	Agriculture	12.0
5	Liberal Arts	8.8	5	Construction	9.5
6	Music	7.7	6	Sales & Marketing	7.5
7	Basic Skills	6.3	7	Consumer & Homemaking	5.9
8	Other	.2	8	Other	21.9

Source: Copa, George Perceived Needs for Education Beyond High School By Residents of Minnesota's West Central Economic Development Region. Fergus Falls, Minnesota, November 1976.

A conclusion drawn from the study by the representatives of the West Minn Consortium, was that, essentially, adults in this rural area of West Central Minnesota are more interested in continuing their education for personal development and self-improvement (60%) than they are for reasons

of vocational advancement (40%) through job training.

During the fall and winter quarters of 1976-77, a student survey was completed by a sample of 40 students attending evening courses at the University of Minnesota, Morris. When asked what was the most important reason for enrolling, 54.7% indicated they attended for personal enrichment or "just for fun." Only 12.8% indicated that job training or professional advancement was the most important reason for their enrolling. Of this sample, only 34% indicated they were interested in formal credit. Enrollment in this program has shown a 227% increase in non-credit registrations and a 31% increase in credit registrations in 1975-76 over 1974-75.

In a community education needs assessment (5) conducted by the Morris Community Education Office and the University of Minnesota, Morris in 1973 in Morris, Minnesota, 1,813 individuals were sampled. Personal development and recreation ranked as the number one and number two reasons for wanting to learn by adults participating in this survey. Table 7 shows the subject areas of interest indicated by the participants in the survey.

Table 7. Subject Areas of Interest of Potential Adult Learners Participating in a Community Education Survey in 1973 in Morris, Minnesota

Subject	Number of Responses
Roller Skating	343
Swimming	329
Ceramics	297
Guitar	287
Crocheting	272
Interior Decorating	262
First Aid	265
Typing	175
Bookkeeping	142
Income Tax	129
Banking & Budgeting	102
Auto Mechanics	107
Farm Management	77

Source: Morris Community Education Survey: Morris, Minnesota, 1973.

Statistics kept on 254 potential adult students seeking advising and counseling through the Morris Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, Morris during 1975-76 showed that the subject areas of social science and humanities accounted for 44.2% of the stated areas of interest. Business subjects were of interest to 23.1% of these 254 individuals. Of these 254 adults, 150 or 59.1% were women.

Perhaps this analysis begins to shed some light upon the focus of learning efforts between rural and urban adults. Rural adults seem to focus their efforts toward non-credit personal development, whereas, urban adults seem to participate more readily in credit programs of a vocational nature.

Barriers Experienced

Perhaps one of the reasons that adults residing in rural areas do not avail themselves of more education is because significant barriers exist that prevent them from attending programs.

Valley (6) identifies three types of barriers to expanded adult learning opportunities as: 1) dispositional, e.g., attitudes, beliefs, interests, etc.; 2) situational, e.g., costs and resources; and 3) organizational, e.g., structural and legal. He further indicates that these barriers exist for students, educational institutions, state governments and other agencies. This complicates and compounds the barrier phenomen, particularly in a rural area where post-secondary institutions are not readily accessible.

A conclusion drawn from the study in Iowa conducted by the Educational Testing Service (6) was that rural residents indicated possible interest in learning; however, they recognized that significant barriers exist. The report states that 64% couldn't decide what way of learning was best for them. Does this mean, then, that they are not interested in continuing to

learn? The study concluded that it did, at least in formal programs.

In a study conducted in California (27) it was found that a potential 8.4 million of that state's 14.7 million adults desired further learning. When asked why they had not become involved in formal learning activities, many responded that they had difficulty in locating educational opportunities; others lacked individual assessment and counseling. The report concluded that there were less opportunities for formal education and counseling services in rural areas.

Most of the previous studies cited (6, 10, 11, 20, 21, 23) concerning participation in formal education indicated that a majority of the part-time participants in post-secondary education had some prior college experience. In addition, most of those adults possessing prior college experience were also characterized as urban residents. When one looks at a rural area for comparative data, the contrast is significant. In the nine-county area of West Central Minnesota analyzed for this study, the percentage of adults over age 25 possessing a high school diploma is 48.2%. In other words, 51.8% of adults over the age of 25 in this rural region of the state, have not graduated from high school. Coupling this statistic with the great distances between post-secondary institutions (see Appendix A) and the lack of advising and counseling for adults, one begins to realize the apparent lack of interest in participation in formal programs. Perhaps this allows one to begin to understand the orientation toward practical, non-credit, self-improvement learning experiences that adults in rural areas seem to prefer instead of formal credit.

During the summer of 1976, a survey (4) was conducted of 3,606 households in West Central Minnesota to determine the perceived needs for continuing education by residents of the area. A secondary purpose of the

survey was to determine what, if any, barriers exist that keep people from enrolling in continuing education programs. The author served as a consulting representative of the West Minn Consortium to the study team from the University of Minnesota. According to the results of the survey, 1,059 respondents out of a total of 3,630 (29.2%) indicated significant barriers existed which prevented their further attendance. Table 8 shows these perceived barriers to access to further education.

Table 8. Perceived Barriers to Access to Further Education by Residents of West Central Minnesota

Perceived Barrier	Number	%
Requirement of job	386	36.5
Distance (too far)	346	32.7
Family obligations	307	28.9
Inconvenient time program offered	284	26.9
Cost too high and lacked finances	192	18.1
Not informed	155	14.9

Source: Perceived Needs for Education Beyond High School By Residents of Minnesota's West Central Economic Development Region. West Central Development Commission, Fergus Falls, Minnesota 1976.

In a research study conducted in 1975 in a similar region of West Central Minnesota, Marienau (18) found that potential adult learners stated they experienced and perceived access barriers to continued learning. She identified five barriers:

1. access (distance to educational facilities)
2. family responsibilities
3. finances (lack of)
4. time (lack of)
5. motivation (lack of, including lack of supportive assistance from within the family unit)

From this brief review of the literature, one quickly sees that access barriers that exist for many rural adults may not exist as equally for urban adults, especially when participation in formal educational programs is concerned.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Perhaps the literature on adult learning experiences in rural (and urban) areas can best be summarized by the following statements:

1. Frequency of Participation:

   a. There appears to be no general concensus in the literature to support the premise that adult learning takes place in formal settings at about the same frequency in rural and urban areas--at least within the context of formal credit programs; however, there appears to be no general concensus that it does not.

   b. several isolated studies strongly suggest that adults in rural areas do participate very frequently in non-credit programs.

   c. there appears to be substantial evidence indicating that participation in learning activities in both rural and urban settings is most heavily concentrated in age categories of below age 40.

   d. several studies suggest that in urban areas men participate more frequently in learning activities, whereas, in rural areas, there is more participation on the part of women.

2. Focus of Learning Efforts:

   a. there appears to be general support for the thesis that in urban areas the focus of adult learners is on formal credit, whereas, in rural areas adults tend to focus their efforts upon non-credit activities.

   b. education for vocational advancement seems to be the primary interest for adults in urban areas, whereas, education for personal development and self-improvement seem to be the motivating factors for adults in rural areas.

3. Barriers Experienced:

   a. there is general concensus that significant barriers exist more often for rural adults that indeed prevent their pursuit of continued learning.

   b. there is general concensus that the most serious barriers are: access to educational programs (distance), lack of adequate finances, and lack of adequate advising and counseling.

Recommendations

It was the intention of this study to report the findings for their

relevance to adult education administration, practice and policy. Factors to consider are program development, resource allocation, marketing, financing and evaluation.

1. Program Development. The results of this study seem to recommend that adult education programs in rural areas should be developed with a strong emphasis upon self-improvement and personal development and probably non-credit in nature.

2. Resource Allocation. If the emphasis of rural adult education programs is on self-improvement and non-credit in nature, then the faculty chosen to teach should be pragmatic in their approach and selected for their ability to relate to the clientele, and not selected only on the basis of academic credentials.

3. Marketing. Personal and developmental needs of adults constantly change. The rural adult education "marketplace" is extremely fluid and programs should constantly be modified to reflect changing needs.

4. Financing. Most adults participating in self-improvement programs pay their own tuition and costs--so program costs should be kept minimal.

5. Evaluation. Formal credit, grades and evaluation reports will be less meaningful to adults participating in non-credit, self-improvement programs. Affective level growth will be as important to measure as cognitive level growth.

Summary

This study reflects an initial effort by the author in investigating the world of adult learning in rural settings. It is reported in the context of ongoing inquiry and points to areas for further research. It indicates that adults in rural areas are indeed interested in continued learning; however, they do face significant barriers. Perhaps one needs to look at the literature of rural sociology to better understand rural adults' needs for continued learning. This could be the focus for future research.

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APPENDIX A

West Central Minnesota